

PRIDE wraps area in red ribbons BY WYNN KOEBEL FOSTER

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Pride was evident on local streets on Oct. 21. You could tell by the bright red ribbons. Approximately 550 children, parents, officials and educators walked a two-mile course that Sunday afternoon. They started and ended at Norridge Park, 4631 N. Overhill Ave. The event was the seventh annual Red Ribbon Walk, sponsored by PRIDE (People Responsibly Involved in Drug Education).

Supporters include the villages of Norridge and Harwood Heights, Norwood Park Township, Norridge School District 80, Union Ridge School District 86, Pennoyer School District 79, Ridgewood High School District 234, Divine Savior School in Norridge, St. Eugene School in Chicago, the Eisenhower Library, Norwood Park Township Family Services and the Cook County Sheriff's Youth Services Department.

Leading the procession was parade marshall Arnie Norris, recently retired guidance chairman at Ridgewood High School. Norris helped to found the local Community PRIDE organization. Along their route, marchers tied red ribbons around trees and bannisters, symbolizing the community's commitment to remain drug free. Everyone wore red.

"I saw red hair ribbons, red balloons, red T-shirts, red sweatshirts - a sea of red," said Carla Forster, a special education teacher at Union Ridge School. "There were a lot of faces I recognized, including more than 100 from Union Ridge.

"There were kids, parents pushing strollers and even a few anti-drug dogs."

Sponsors passed out red stickers. Forster took one that read "I have better things to do than drugs."

The weather was mild and sunny; the mood of the crowd was upbeat.

"We owe the weather to our Red Ribbon 'angels,' who came through for us once again," said event co-chairman Sheila Wachholder. "Both Harwood Heights Mayor Norb Pabich and Norridge Mayor Earl Field came, along with several trustees from their villages.

"U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9, marched with us. She was very interested in PRIDE and our mission."

The Ridgewood Pep Band played up-tempo music in the park, and the crowd sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," Wachholder said.

PRIDE members passed out flyers listing past and upcoming activities.

Harwood Heights Trustee Joe Scott walked with his daughter, Allison, an eighth-grade student at Pennoyer.

"She carried one end of her school's banner along the whole two-mile course," Scott said. "Any attempt to steer kids in the right direction is a worthy attempt."

For Assistant Chief Chuck Ghiloni, of the Norridge Police Department, the march was his fourth.

"Events like this give kids a chance to meet kids from other area schools in a social setting," Ghiloni said. "I think that makes the transition to high school easier for them.

"This was my son's first year in soccer. He attends Divine Savior, so he didn't know any of the kids from the public schools when he started.

"Before the march, he asked me if his soccer friends would be there."

PRIDE sponsors fall and spring dances for junior-high students, too. Last December, the group also hosted a successful ice-skating party during the holidays. Following the Red Ribbon Walk, the marchers returned to Norridge Park for taffy apples, lemonade and fruit punch. Refreshments were provided by the Rotary Club of Harwood Heights and Norridge.